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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [UNSC](#) [ETTC](#) [ER](#) [SU](#)  
SUBJECT: THE DARFUR BUZZ FROM ASMARA: NO GOOD NEWS FOR  
THE DPA

CLASSIFIED BY: AMB Scott H. DeLisi, for reasons 1.4  
(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Since early June, Embassy Asmara has been following the rumors and activities of key Darfur players in Asmara. PolOff has met with each of the leaders of the newly formed National Redemption Front (NRF) as well as AbdulWahid Nour and his father-in-law Abul Gasem. NRF leaders in Asmara claim that support is waning for both AbdulWahid (reports received July 31 suggest that he has been replaced; septel) and Mini Minawi. The NRF leaders also forcefully reject the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) as currently drafted. While information from the parties is often contradictory, all have indicated that they could work within the DPA framework if amended to better address issues of security, compensation and representation for the people of Darfur. Although the GSE has, like the NRF, publicly criticized the DPA, there is speculation that is nonetheless trying to get the Darfurian non-signatories to ascribe to a common - and hopefully constructive - position. The GSE, however, continues to keep its own counsel. Until we know more, and in light of the GSE's reported support for the ICU in Somalia, we will continue to remain wary about GSE intentions. End Summary.

BACKGROUND: THE FORMATION OF THE NRF

¶2. (C) In early June, the National Redemption Front was formed in Asmara, Eritrea by a number of the non-signatories to the DPA. The NRF is made up of former Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) leaders Sharif Harir and Khamis Abdalla Abakar, as well as Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) leader Khalil Ibrahim and Sudan Federal Democratic Alliance (SFDA) founder and former governor of Darfur, Ahmed Diraige. While there was some talk that SLM/A leader AbdulWahid would sign on to the NRF, he has stated that he cannot align himself with "Islamic fundamentalist" Khalil Ibrahim.

¶3. (C) The initial June founding document of the NRF called on the people of Darfur to reject the Abuja process and DPA, but did not provide much in terms of rationale or recommendations. The July 14 "Darfur People Demands and the Rejection of Abuja Document," offers greater clarification. In particular, the

document lays out the NRF's main requirements for security arrangements, power sharing and access to wealth. Core demands include disarmament of the janjaweed and other militias; security arrangements for protecting the people in the region; fair and adequate compensation; recognition of Darfur as one state; and fair representation of Darfurians at all levels of government. (Note: The original documents have been faxed to AF/SPG. End Note.)

#### VIEWS OF THE NRF

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¶4. (C) In separate meetings with Poloff, each of the NRF leaders claimed that Mini Minawi and AbdulWahid have lost support on the ground. They stated that many of the SLM/A and SLM/M commanders - the G-19 - who had been loyal previously to AbdulWahid or Mini have shifted support to the NRF. In addition, several claimed that Mini's political advisor, Ibrahim Ahmed Ibrahim, and a number of AbdulWahid's close group of nine advisors have defected. The NRF believes it is imperative to defeat Mini militarily, to "put him in his place." Sharif and Khamis reasoned that if the NRF continues to attack Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and can defeat Mini then the international community will be forced to recognize the NRF's intrinsic role in achieving peace in Darfur. With joined forces of the G-19 and JEM, they believe Mini could be crushed in a matter of weeks.

#### VIEWS OF ABDULWAHID'S FATHER-IN-LAW

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¶5. (C) In a July 21 meeting with Abul Gasem, AbdulWahid's father-in-law, Abul Gasem stated that AbdulWahid would sign the DPA if certain items could be amended or supplemented. He also stated that AbdulWahid could be convinced to step down as leader the SLM/A and that Diraige of the NRF was being considered as a possible replacement. When asked why he believed so, Abul Gasem alluded to rumors of AbdulWahid being ill and internal personality conflicts with other SLM members. In meetings with Diraige and AbdulWahid, Abul Gasem's comment on a change of leadership in the SLM/A appears to be far from the truth. However, as of July 31, a press release from the SLM/A reports a possible dethroning of AbdulWahid by one of his close advisors and commanders. It is unclear at this time what the results may be or whether a change in leadership will push the SLM/A closer to signing the DPA or aligning with the NRF.

#### VIEWS OF ABDULWAHID

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¶6. (C) PolOff met with AbdulWahid and his advisor Dr. Ahmed Abdallah on July 26 to gauge his support for the DPA at this stage and elicit his perspectives on the NRF. From the outset, he appeared agitated by any talk about the NRF or Mini Minawi, stating that "you guys created Mini". Throughout the meeting, he would occasionally ask where Mini was and seemed upset when Dr. Ahmed replied that he was in the U.S. meeting at the White House. AbdulWahid adamantly denied rumors that he was losing his support base. He asserted that if he signed onto the DPA or other agreement, the commanders would lay down their arms and there would be peace in Darfur, because the people of Darfur listen to him.

¶7. (C) AbdulWahid explained at length why he opposes the DPA, echoing points similar to those voiced by the NRF. He conceded that he could work with the DPA, as long as it could be amended to address some of these outstanding concerns. AbdulWahid emphasized that an amended DPA needs to designate Darfur as one federal

region and to stipulate that Darfurians be represented at all levels of government with representation proportional to their percentage of the population. In his view, without majority rule in Darfur, the SLM or any other party would have difficulty implementing a peace agreement. AbdulWahid called for the immediate disarmament of the janjaweed and other militia forces to enable IDPs to move back into their villages and homes. However, the GNU could not be responsible for providing security, at least immediately. For people to feel safe and return to their homes in Darfur, a UN or NATO force must provide security in the region and undertake the disarmament of the janjaweed and militias. "Without this, there will be no peace in Darfur," he noted.

18. (C) Once the security and power sharing arrangements are worked out, AbdulWahid explained, the people of Darfur should be compensated for what they have endured. Darfur, he said, "is different from the South. The people of Darfur were not just caught in the fire, they were victimized." Compensation should address not only rehabilitation, but also entail "corrective justice," to include moral, financial, and educational compensation. While AbdulWahid was adamant that it was not just about the money, he did emphasize that the \$30 million in seed money was inadequate to fully compensate the Darfurians. (Note: AbdulWahid did not provide an amount but others in Asmara have been using the figure of \$150-200 million. End Note.) When asked whether he believed that the international community should be responsible, he explained that some if not all of the money should come from the national government itself and derived from national revenues.

#### ERITREA'S ROLE IN DARFUR

19. (C) The Sudan watchers in Asmara remain baffled as to the extent of GSE involvement or its intent vis-a-vis Darfur. Speculation runs the gamut from a GSE strategy to undermine Bashir to one that instead seeks to strengthen bilateral relations with Sudan. The GSE continues to deny any ulterior motives in bringing the non-signatories to the Darfur agreement together in Asmara and has not publicly acknowledged any role in the creation of the NRF. The GSE has, in its view, been upfront with the GNU about its role in Darfur and they arguably could be playing the role of honest broker, much as they seem to be in the negotiations between the GNU and the Eastern Front. Even during the last round of Abuja, the Eritrean representative there reportedly told VP Taha, when it seemed apparent that some parties would not sign on to the DPA, that he believed it was important to keep all the non-signatories together and continue to try for unity. We also have been told that the Eritreans have reiterated this point directly with Bashir and told him that the Eritreans would invite the non-signatories to Asmara.

#### NRF WHEREABOUTS

10. (C) Many of the NRF will be out of Asmara for most of August. Khalil left July 20 for Paris. We have been told he had meetings in Berlin earlier this week and believe he is traveling on to N'djamena in the near future. Diraige departed the evening of July 26 for London and Botswana. Sharif is rumored to have departed July 30 for Norway and plans to visit Darfur in the coming weeks. Khamis also claims to be leaving town in the next few days for Darfur. AbdulWahid did not seem to have any plans to leave Asmara. Abul Gasem has informed post that he will depart Asmara on August 1.

COMMENT

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¶11. (C) The buzz in Asmara indicates a decline in support for both AbdulWahid and Mini Minawi but quantifying the level of either man's support remains difficult as allegiances continue to shift like the sand. The decline in both men's standing among the Darfurians we encounter, however, seems clear and the most likely beneficiary is the NRF. Although even the NRF remains open to using the DPA as a starting point for further discussion, we have yet to see any indication that new signatories for the DPA "as is" are ready to come forward.

¶12. (C) As for the GSE's intentions regarding Sudan, they continue to keep their own counsel. Their actions as mediator in the Eastern Front negotiations have appeared to be constructive and we welcome their efforts to date. However, no one is clear as to what role, if any, the GSE played in the formation of the NRF. Nor do we really know whether its goal is stability in western Sudan or whether it sees continued instability (and a GSE handle on the NRF) as giving it greater leverage there. Time will tell. However, given the GSE's opposition to a UN force in Darfur, its recent caustic rhetoric about the USG role in the Horn, and its reported support for the ICU in Somalia, we will, for now, remain wary about GSE intentions in Sudan.

End Comment.

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